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Doctor Who *The Feast of the* *Stone*

by Cavan Scott and Mark Wright



The scream had sliced through the silence like a knife through flesh. As the vibrations echoed from crag to crag, something deep within stirred, its sleep disturbed. Yet it couldn't sleep now. A scream hadn't been heard here for centuries, and the cries of the past had never sounded like that. That had been a bellow, a roar as if the very fabric of reality had been ripped apart, not the shriek of a terrified child. And the cave wasn't empty any more. Dust that had lain for eons had been displaced by the arrival of a tall, blue box, dancing in the light from the fiery beacon that pulsed atop the structure. The low, resonating hum that cocooned the box was fascinating, and the something deep within reached out, only to find its consciousness touched, pricked by another presence. A presence the like of which it had never felt before. A presence it found appealing.

Something deep within awoke and felt the hunger gnawing

The TARDIS door slammed, leaving the Doctor standing alone, staring out into the vast darkness that lay beyond. He stepped forward, footsteps echoing away into nothing. The chamber he was in must be enormous.

He sniffed the air as he walked forward a few more feet. "Rank," he said to himself, coming to a stop at a sheer rock wall. "Nobody's been in here for centuries." He ran his hand down the wall, feeling the grain. It was warm and wet.

The Doctor looked back towards the TARDIS and sighed.

"I guess I'd better go after him," Alison said, to break the awkward silence. The Master stood opposite, arms folded.

"Well," he shrugged, "I can hardly do that, can I my dear?"

Alison moved to grab her jacket from the back of an armchair. "Do

you think I should apologise to him then?"

"And now we add guidance counsellor to my ever growing list of new duties." The Master placed both hands wearily against the controls.

"Miss Cheney, you will do what you will do." He flicked a switch and the doors swung open. Alison said nothing. Instead she turned and walked the length of the control chamber and disappeared into the square of darkness framed by the doors.

As the doors closed behind her, the Master cast an eye heavenwards.
"Kids."

Alison stepped from the threshold of the TARDIS into the stone chamber. She drew her jacket around her, hugging her arms tight around her body against the cold. Looking around she saw the Doctor, some distance away, striding across the chamber.

"Doctor!"

"Not now. I'm talking."

The Doctor waved his hand dismissively at whoever was trying to attract his attention and turned back to the sea of faces, their fixed, rapt expressions urging him on to finish his tale. "... and so I said the Slarvian at the bar can stay, but the fellah in the Quark suit will have to go!"

After a pause, the entire room erupted into laughter. They even liked his jokes. This was the best party he'd been to since Woodstock. Now, where was that waiter with his champagne? In the back of his mind, the Doctor seemed to remember someone telling him he was drinking more these days, but a lot had happened recently. He had changed. Could they blame him? And besides, this was supposed to be a party!

Alison stared after the Doctor. Had he just completely ignored her? He was now standing with his back to her, hand in the air, seemingly staring into space. She was starting to think that maybe he was a few fries short of a Happy Meal.

She shuddered as a drop of icy water landed on the back of her neck. She looked up. It felt like somebody was running cold fingertips down her spine. Sheer walls of dank, mould-infested rock stretched up above to the gloomy roof. It was like some great, petrified cathedral. Not far away, just beyond the motionless Doctor, stood a squat, crumbling base of rock. It looked like some kind of crude altar, but she couldn't be sure. A stone trough ran down from the altar. A trough for what? Whatever it was, the rock surrounding it was stained jet black. And where was that breeze coming from? She turned three hundred and sixty degrees, but there didn't seem to be any kind of entrance or exit. There was a heap of slick boulders, piled up in a massive heap behind the TARDIS. Whatever had happened, Alison knew she didn't like it so it was time to grab the Doctor and get the hell out of here. She started to move towards...

... the hospital bed. Her Nana looked beautiful, propped up by a ludicrous amount of pillows.

"What's wrong, pet?" Nana asked, her voice small and croaky.

"Nothing," Alison replied, confused for a second. She looked around the room. The flowers her mum brought every day. The plastic water jug. The heart monitor, punctuating the silence with its regular beat.

"You're not off, are you?"

Big, grey eyes gazed back at her.

Alison smiled, trying not to look sad, just like her Mum had told her. "Course not, Nana."

"... and would you believe it, the treasure turned out to be nothing more than a lovely bunch of coconuts!"

The Doctor's smile widened as his guests responded warmly to his story.

"Dash fine story, old boy," said the Colonel, ruddy-faced, pumping the Doctor's hand vigorously. "Worked up quite an appetite listening to your exploits, Doctor."

"Most kind, Colonel, but, as I always said, you could work up an appetite snoring the day away in your armchair."

The room felt silent, social tension ripe in the air. The guests shifted uncomfortably. Had the Doctor gone too far this time? The silence lasted a second longer before the colonel erupted into laughter, his face reddening a shade deeper. The rest of the entourage followed suit, social grace restored.

The colonel slapped the Doctor on the back and moved off, his eyes on the waitress who had just passed. The Doctor smiled good naturedly. The old rogue.

Left alone for the minute, the Doctor let his eyes roam the room. Where was she? Why did she always wander off when he was in full flow?

He felt the gentlest of touches on the back of his neck, causing the Doctor to scrunch up his shoulders instinctively.

"Stop it!" he giggled. The finger persevered. "You know I hate being tickled." The Doctor laughed out loud, turning and grabbing the hand, wincing...

... as the acrid stench hit his nostrils, throwing his arms up to protect himself from the far away blast of another explosion. The grit stung against his eyes, more bombs thudding in the distance, connecting with the scorched, decimated earth.

He stumbled across the rubble, climbing as high as he could to survey the carnage before him, spots of white flesh and ripped uniforms acting as markers for the dead beneath the ruins.

Alison held her Nana's tissue thin hand. She could almost see the weak pulse fighting its way through the vein in her arm. For her Nana's sake she fought back the tears, biting her lip so hard it hurt.

"What's wrong, pet?" her Nana asked.

Before she could answer, the radio in the corner of the room crackled with static, before bursting into life. Alison turned...

... her arms in the air, surrounded by a throb of bodies, all dancing, arms pumping in time to the wicked beat. The euphoria was overwhelming, a wave of love rushing throughout the crowd. She moved close to Joe, their faces almost touching.

"This is great!" she shouted, and let the music take her to...

... her Nana stirred, eyes flickering, but then she was still.

"It's alright, Nana. Go back to sleep." She squeezed the hand that she would have clung on to forever, but the touch on her shoulder pulled her away.

"She's gone, love." It was her mum, face glistening with tears.

The pit of Alison's stomach fell away and she buried herself in her mum's chest. After a minute, her mum put her hand under her chin...

... and she looked into Joe's eyes, the music pounding, drowning everything else out...

... the Doctor revelled in the laughter of yet another expertly delivered morsel of bon mot...

... Alison hugged her mum...

... the Doctor giggled, swatting away the hand...

... the music blasted her ear drums. She loved everyone...

... the battlefield was empty, save for the Doctor. Alone. Victorious...

... the beat goes on...

... the clock struck midnight. The audience laughed. The Doctor frowned, looking into his champagne glass before pouring it onto the floor.

Blood splattered over his shoes.

He looked up at the other guests who were happily taking back huge mouthfuls of thick, red blood from their overflowing champagne

flutes, letting the sticky substance pour in slow moving rivulets down their chins.

"Something's wrong."

"Doctor!"

A lone voice, clear and bright in the room. The Doctor whipped round, finding himself in the stark cold of the chamber. A shaft of light spilled across the stone floor, reaching his shoes.

The TARDIS doors were open, shining like a beacon, the Master framed on the threshold, his hand outstretched. "Doctor, take my hand!"

The Doctor took a step forward, but hesitated. A playful whisper breathed in his ear, a hand on his shoulder, pulling him back. He turned. The party was still in full swing, a sea of faces, waiting for the next tale. He had a part to play.

"No!" With a definite turn, he wrenched himself away from the crowd and threw himself towards the TARDIS and the reaching hand of the Master...

... who grabbed the Doctor and pulled him inside the TARDIS, his android strength hurling him bodily across the control room. The Doctor was immediately on his feet, running for the doors, only to be thrown back by the Master once again.

"Get out of my way! Alison's still out there!"

"Do you really think I'm going to let you go back out there? Look!" The Master pointed to the scanner screen. Alison was suspended in mid-air over the altar, arms pulled out to the side, her body convulsing

as unseen terrors swarmed around her. The corners of the cavern were growing darker, shadows moving in from all sides.

"Do you see them?"

The Master squinted at the screen. "The shadows? Yes, most intriguing."

The Doctor bounded across to the controls, pouncing on levers and dials like a cat. "There's obviously something out there."

"A ghost in the machine, if you will," the Master arrived by the Doctor's side at a more sedate pace.

"What do you mean?"

"Really, Doctor, you can be slow on the uptake sometimes. You weren't alone out there and I'm not talking about those hallucinations. There's something else. Something alive. It reached out to me just after we landed. A presence."

"Why didn't you warn us?" The Doctor asked, a note of accusation in his voice.

"Even after all this time, you still can't bring yourself to trust me, can you? If you remember, my dear Doctor, yourself and Miss Cheney did leave the ship rather quickly. I believe the word I'm looking for is... flounce?"

The Doctor glared.

"It doesn't change anything, Doctor. There's still something out there."

"Something in the rock?"

"Exactly."

The Doctor fell silent for a second, his mind racing.

"And something extremely hungry."

Now, it was the Master's turn to look bemused. The Doctor meanwhile, began jabbing at this control and that, throwing random switches and pulling levers almost as if he knew what he was doing.

"You've heard of the stone tape effect I take it?"

The Master groaned.

"We're not going to have one of your tiresome lectures now are we?"

"I'll never forget how they jeered dear old Lethbridge back at Cambridge. He was really quite shaken, but I soon rallied around. Thomas, I said, the closed cloisters of academia will never embrace the freethinker. I should know."

The Master ran a hand through his hair, fighting the irritation that threatened to bubble to the surface.

"Your point being? And do I need to remind you that the delightful Miss Cheney appears to be in mortal danger?"

"Now who's being slow on the uptake?" the Doctor asked. On the scanner, the shadows moved ever closer to Alison. "Thomas theorised that ghosts and ghoulies weren't visitors from another plane of existence but simply recordings of extreme or primal emotion."

"And that the physical environment, in this case the rock, acted as a recording medium to preserve this charming scene for posterity," the Master concluded.

"Precisely. When a person sees what popular fiction throughout the Universe calls a ghost, their mind acts like a tape recorder playing back the images in the stone."

"But this is a slightly more... tangible problem, is it not?"

The Doctor tutted. "Of course it is. We're not dealing with a mere recording, but the principle is the same. Whatever is trapped in that rock is sentient and feeding off our memories like some..." The Doctor struggled for the words, "Psychic vampire."

"Melodramatic, but somewhat appropriate."

"Whatever this mood-sucker is, I think it's been asleep for a very long time, and our arrival awoke it from its slumber."

Triumphantly, the Doctor hit a final switch with a flourish.

"There! I've reprogrammed the TARDIS scanner to focus in on the psionic resonance within the cavern. We should be able to see what Alison is seeing. Look."

The image on the scanner screen shifted, as if through heat haze and the Doctor gasped as a barrage of scenes flashed before them.

... A coffin being lowered to the ground...

... Wet, black blood spilling across an altar...

... The heavy beat of a dance track...

... Wet, black blood spilling across an altar...

... The tenderness of a dark bedroom...

... Wet, black blood spilling across an altar...

... Opening a present under the shadow of a sparkling Christmas tree...

... Alison pulling the trigger, the guard's brains splattering across the metal of the wall...

The Doctor's hand slammed down onto the console. "Wait! That's isn't Alison's memory."

"I would hope not, unless we're harbouring a murderer."

"We are. You!"

A quizzical smile lingered around the Master's lips. "I must confess, the scene does have some familiarity about it."

"It's your memory."

"What exactly are you implying, Doctor?"

"You and I! We are inextricably and uniquely linked to this ship. But you even more so." The Doctor pointed at the Master. "I designed you and the TARDIS to be inseparable and somehow it's your consciousness that has awakened the beast."

The puzzlement was replaced with a knowing smile.

"How flattering. It's so nice to be the organ grinder once again and not the..."

The words died in the Master's throat as his eyes spun upwards. A faceplate swung outwards, revealing the Master's android reality. The Doctor lifted his hand away from the deactivation switch on the console.

The TARDIS shuddered, buffeted by an unseen energy wave. The Doctor grabbed the controls to steady himself.

"You didn't like that, did you?" he shouted up to ceiling, but the momentary triumph was destroyed by Alison's scream of agony on the scanner screen.

"Leave her alone!" the Doctor nearly screamed, slamming his fist

down on the controls in frustration.

The image on the scanner began to change rapidly, cycling through a mass cacophony of conflicting emotions.

In the chamber, the shadows drew closer to the suspended form of Alison, wave after wave of psionic energy slamming into her. One of the shadows took on a more human form, its whispery, incoherent form rising up, its raised arm brandishing what could have once been a dagger.

The Doctor raced around the controls, flicking switches, turning dials, but nothing had any effect.

"You've had the canapés!" he shouted at the scanner, "And now you want everything else on the menu!" The TARDIS was slammed sideways and the Doctor was thrown to the ground. Behind him, the Master's metallic features sparked with tendrils of blue energy for a split second. The Doctor sat bolt upright, looking at his consciously absent companion. "Still connected," he said quietly. "I wonder... "

Alison screamed again, launching the Doctor into action.

"You're a leech!" he called up to the ceiling, ducking underneath the console and returning with a thick coil of copper wire that was connected to the console. "A vampire!" He unrolled the coil of wire and ran to the Master, attaching two bulky crocodile clips to either side of the android's temples. "Feeding on our emotions!"

The Doctor's hands were a blur across the controls, and the central column began to vibrate with power, throbbing up into the vaulted ceiling. An eruption of sparks cast a halo around the Master's head, the ribbon of blue energy snaking down the wires and into the depths of the controls.

"You used him as your conduit, didn't you? Recognised an evil almost equal to your own, and you used that to get me." The Doctor glanced at the scanner. The shadows were drawing ever nearer. "And Alison".

"Whatever you are, whatever evil created you, you must have caused terror beyond belief..." The Doctor placed his hand firmly on a lever. "But let me tell you, you've got nothing on my companion here. Whatever atrocities you've committed, he's perpetrated worse. If it's evil you want, then it's evil you shall have!"

The Doctor pulled the lever.

A wave of energy blasted from the Police Box's lantern, zigzagging across the darkness of the chamber to envelope the still suspended Alison.

The shadows drew back from the cold blue aura cast by the energy wave, lighting up the chamber, and the cracked and broken altar, stained with long spilt blood.

The Doctor's entire body was suffused with coruscating energy, bridging the circuit between the Master and the console. His hand whitened around the lever as pulses of energy flowed from the Master, streaming down the connecting wires. The Master's still form began to glow hot. Waves of violent power cascaded up through the central column.

The aura around Alison burned incandescently. At first they cowered against the light as their victims had cowered centuries before as they'd slaughtered and fed on the spilt blood. Then, as if the craving renewed its hold on their souls, they began to inch forward, dim eyes

full of this new banquet. For a second they seemed to grow, feeding off the energy all around, features forming on their wraith-like form. Eyes burned. Nails tore through the air. Teeth bared.

Alison screamed, pain searing through her as the remnants of the ancient cult swelled up and advanced step by step to plunge the knife that would burst her heart.

The Doctor screamed, the energy wave from the console lapping around his arms, the Master's memories scorching through his mind, atrocities he could never have imagined.

The shadows screamed, fingers clawing the air, a banshee wail soaring in pitch as the wave reached its crescendo of intensity. Such evil to gorge on. Such loathing. Too much to contain, too much to resist. Too much to...

A final surge of raw power flared across the cavern, splintering the shadows one by one as the cacophony reached its peak. The ancient altar, cracked and ancient, exploded into dust, the final victim of the tidal wave of hate.

As the echo died, Alison's body thudded to the ground.

And then silence.

Alison pulled the tartan blanket closer as the Doctor draped it over her shoulders, absently pulling at a thread in the stitching of the old leather chair. She didn't look up as a glass was thrust into her still shaking hand. The golden liquid swilled inside. She sniffed it. Brandy.

"It's a good one, so sip it."

Alison glanced up at the flaccid Master, leaning like a discarded

puppet by the central column.

"What happened to him?" she asked.

"The entity was using the Master as a conduit to the TARDIS and us. His psionic essence, if you will, was broadcast by the ship on our arrival. It's curious. Neither my intelligence, nor the TARDIS's for that matter, awoke it from its snooze, but the Master must have something in common with the creature that struck a nerve."

"Perhaps it's because he can't leave the ship, just like that thing couldn't leave the cave."

A shadow passed over the Doctor's features.

"Perhaps. Whatever, the empathetic link, no doubt boosted by the ship's telepathic circuits, was enough to trigger the stone tape effect. Vampirism at its most primal and brutal."

The grandfather clock at the threshold to the TARDIS inner chambers ticked by a handful of torturous seconds.

"And so... "

"And so, I was forced to deactivate him. It was the only way to loosen the entity's hold on you and get us out of there."

The odour of the liquor stung Alison's nostrils. "Isn't that a bit too easy?" The Doctor didn't reply, looking absently at a control dial.

"I said, isn't that too easy?"

He looked up. "What do you mean?"

"I thought he was your friend."

The words seemed to faze him, just for a second.

"He was... he is."

Alison snorted with laughter. "For somebody who's so clever you can't half be stupid sometimes, Doctor."

The Doctor narrowed his eyes. "I beg your pardon?"

"It doesn't work like that in the real world, Doctor. My world. You don't get to switch friends off when things get tough."

"I had no choice."

Alison nodded sadly and sniffed at her drink, considering another mouthful. She looked the Doctor in the eyes.

"What happens when you have to turn me off?"

The Doctor kept her gaze but didn't answer. Alison threw her head back and downed the brandy in a single gulp. The blanket fell silently to the floor as she pushed herself up from the chair and disappeared up the staircase to her room.

The Doctor waited for Alison's steps to fade into the distance before turning back to the console. He paused, thinking, before throwing the switch. The Master's body tensed as power surged through relays and circuits, motors and servos buzzing until all was calm.

The two companions stared at each other wordlessly, the Master's eyebrow giving the merest hint of a twitch. The android glanced down, brushed a flake of dust from his pristine cuff and coolly strolled out of the control room, hands clasped behind his back.

The Doctor was alone, save for the throb of the engines in flight. As the clock struck an irrelevant hour, he reached for the decanter and poured himself a very long, very stiff drink.